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VOCATION AND CULTURAL-SPIRITUAL REGIONALIZATION OF GEOGRAPHIC PLACES. RELEVANCE FOR SPATIAL/SPECIAL PLANNING

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The study is based on the assertion that any inhabitable space carries in itself a cultural vocation, i.e. the favorability for a specific cultural product, and spirituality is one of its major dimensions, sometimes associated up to synonymy to culture.

Among the range of cultural, artistic, political, economic and social categories, religion has represented a noticeable manifestation, and the monastic phenomenon in particular represents a constant whose regional materializations are various and active.

The European orthodox cultural area to which the subject of this article is subscribed reveals a well defined contemporary contour of the phenomenon and a density of its material manifestations, accentuated by the favoring political changes of the last two decades. Banishing the restrictions imposed by the communist ideology has generated on the level of religious material culture a true "explosion" of worshiping places, both parishional and monastic. The number of orthodox monasteries alone in the entire European area goes beyond 1700, which cannot remain without an impact upon the various components of social and economic life and therefore, as far as we are concerned, upon the aspects connected with their regionalizing and the influence upon the physical and spatial territorial planning.

Starting from a general, continental and macro-regional distribution and going down to the local level of internal clippings to which monasteries and skytes are subscribed, the major analysis of this paper is focused on the situation in Romania which reunites over 500 monastic establishments (second to Russia numerically but on the top of the list according to social density indicators). The aspects connected with the geographical distribution correlated with architectonic, historic and structural identifiers constitute a topic that has interested along the years either only a specialized audience, or a more recent category of users that have taken into consideration their touristic potential and, through this, the secularizing component of the market and economic value. The scientific literature is nevertheless poor from the viewpoint of studies regarding the role of the monasteries in shaping the spatial culture and in organizing space, and even poorer if we think of land planning in the contemporary world, few bibliographical references being hardly available. The western reasons are related to the relict character of the active monastic phenomenon, and in the east-European societies the reestablishment of spiritual life within the framework of democracy is still fresh. Due to the amplitude (at least material) of its reestablishment, the religious life becomes an important local cultural element that has to be taken into account in the contemporary European politics.

The present paper, written mainly on the basis of field research and analysis, is structured into two parts:

- *the analysis of monasteries spatial distribution and the internal regionalization of monastic spaces using geographical criteria and the degree of accessibility;*
- *the relevance of this material and spiritual identity level of the Romanian space for the directions and actions of land planning, as a special form of spatial planning.*

Since the paper is part of larger scientific endeavor, the present study is organized mainly as an argument for at least two questions: (i) which are the relations between the Romanian Christian spirituality and culture and the European spatial planning, and (ii) what role does local culture play in the process of regional spatial planning.

I. A minimum conceptual clarification

Culture, civilisation and religion

The relation among these three categories is neither new, nor worn out but it seems to regain vigor and interest in the contemporary secularized postmodernism due to its irradiation towards more and more topical fields such as that of spatial planning. The very core of an exhausting postmodernism is the place where the seeds of a new antithetic paradigm, of a transmodernism where the secular discourse and the religious one begin to frequently meet in the political, social and economic spheres, are becoming visible.

The relation among culture, civilisation and religion would require first a clarification of the terms as they do not enjoy a unanimous consensus in the usual circulation. Since culture is often comprised in civilisation, a word which, on its turn, describes a real inconsistency of meanings, and since within the very notion of culture, once separated from civilisation, several processes have to be distinguished, it becomes imperious for us to choose from this variety of meanings the most suitable one to relate with religion.

In the German thought the dissociation operated in the global notion of culture is followed by a second dissociation which consists of cropping the concept of culture from the ambiguity of generality and placing it upon the concrete foundation of the ethnic (Crainic, 1940). Culture as a universal unity is a theoretical abstraction in the same manner humanity is. In the concrete reality there are various cultures as there are various peoples. Fichte, Schlegel and Novalis associate religion to the ethnic genius in order to prepare an atmosphere as pure and propitious as possible for culture to develop. Oswald Spengler reduces culture to a local organism similar to plants that cannot develop unless in a certain place and under a certain sky. Spengler is also the one that makes the unequivocal difference between culture and civilisation, understanding them as successive stages in the development of the same ethnic group. The real strength that allows a culture to survive and further propels it is religion. Culture, as spiritual phenomenon and as expression of ethnical personality, differentiates people from people; the technique though, as expression of the material life, associable to civilisation, is uniform and contains, more than even philosophy does, the principle of generalization, of a concrete and real generalization. Culture and civilisation can therefore exist simultaneously on the two different levels of life, the spiritual one and the material one. For a country like Romania, where the problems of spiritual culture and material civilisation are treated equally, it is an orientational necessity to make this distinction, dictated by the nature of things and by the evolution stage we are going through: Civilisation is international and we can adapt it to the needs of our material life from primitive to organized and from rudimentary to perfected. Imitation corrected by the country's physiognomy is its elementary law. Unlike civilisation, culture necessarily implies the original manner of our ethnic personality. Its law cannot be imitation but autochthony.

According to Lactantiu the term *religion* comes from the verb *religo-are*, this term designating the intimate, free and conscious relation of man with God. This relation is explained theoretically by doctrine, but it is externalized by morals and cult. Therefore, the cult and everything related to it (commemorations, ritual gestures and actions, buildings, constructions and worshipping places) is the expression of the empirical relation between man and divinity.

On regionalization and cultural regionalism

Regionalization is also a source of dualism and debate, being at the same time a factual reality (Vidal de la Blanche) and a mental construction (Entrikin, 1991) generating numerous typologies according to organization vectors and criteria. After the regional formalism era, functionalism became the infallible paradigm used to analyze all territories. The center-periphery relation differentiated the world, the labour market has justified the differences and globalization is about to wipe them out. Each time though we are talking about other differences.

The optimum functioning of the territorial system becomes thus a relevant indicator of the new model of spatial organization synonymous to the region about to be delineated. It will include, from the distribution point of view, all elements polarized by the centripetal vectors of the system in case. Therefore, it will not be surprising the fact that a functional region will include the most different landscapes, various physical and geographical units, nuanced densities of habitats and population, etc. The force line grid and the centripetal orientation of the vectors remain important. Complementariness favors the emergence and diversification of functions, offering the system a larger number of sustaining pears as well as an increased elasticity regarding the need to adapt to new economic or social requirements.

The present study embraces the line of functionalist typology due to the fact that the differences are combined with reciprocal dependencies, and culture and civilisation as dynamic processes have the strength to generate functional macro-regions, without denying the reality and usefulness of the formal rationalizations, especially of the administrative and territorial ones which, at least through the statistical apparatus associated to them, contribute to the decoding and quantification of some cultural phenomena at micro-regional level.

The worshiping place – expression of Romanian spirituality and criterion of spiritual regionalization

When one talks about the Christian worshiping place or liturgical space, the term *church* is by far the most general and frequently used. There are however other special names which emphasize the canonic nature or importance of the particular sacred space: cathedral, monastery, parish church, chapel, etc. The difference among them concerns the liturgical domain and that of church law rather than dogmatic aspects. Most often than not the names are given according to the role played by the institutions represented by the worshiping place in the administrative organization of the church but also according to their practical purpose. Another criterion would be the community to which that particular worshiping place belongs to. The ecclesial architecture also contributes a lot to the naming of a sacred building but it is not an essential element for the classification of a worshiping place from the church law point of view.

From a canonic-administrative point of view in Romania all churches are organized in specific hierarchy: there are 6 (six) Bishoprics, 10 (ten) Archiepiscopates and 17 (seventeen) Episcopates in Romania with more than 12,000 priests and deacons, 631 monasteries, where approximately 3,500 monks and 5,000 nuns live. There are more than 14,500 churches for the orthodox Christians in Romania. In 2002 almost 1.000 of these churches was either under construction or being redecorated.

The information regarding the worshiping places has been gathered from multiple sources since there is no unitary system of statistical registration at the national level besides the Patriarchy, to which the information available at the level of the interested adjacent structures has been added. Thus, the data regarding the patrimony have been gathered mainly from the National Committee of Monuments and the Ministry of Culture, whilst those regarding tourism from the Ministry of Tourism as well as from the more and more numerous bibliographies specialized in tourism and geography.

II. Formal regionalization of churches

There are two major cultural and religious areas functioning in the European space – Catholicism and Orthodoxy, within which regional dogmatic and doctrinarian ramifications can be identified. As known, in the Eastern Church the church – state doublet has determined the autocephaly to act as a way of autonomy but also as cultural identity. Founding and preserving churches is an internal administrative aspect of every church but it may gain political connotations and significance.

The communist dictatorship, imposing certain laws and provisions, abusively prejudiced the manifestation of church autonomy, eliminating the construction of churches (sometimes abusively demolishing not only patrimony worshiping places!), restricting the social assistance activity, the religious education and the religious assistance. Consequently, the material force of Orthodox Church to exist and develop was reduced and, more importantly, its sphere of spiritual influence upon the society was considerably limited. For this reason, under the new social, political and religious circumstances that followed 1990, the central church bodies in the countries of the ex-communist bloc set as a priority the exclusion from the ecclesiastical laws of all provisions that came into conflict with the principles of freedom, democracy and church autonomy.

The European orthodox space encompasses nowadays more than 1,600 monasteries, Russia and Romania holding by far the first two positions, although their territorial and geographical attributes and their populations are very different. In purely quantitative terms, the Romanians and the Russians would be therefore among the strongest European believers, but we do not intent to emphasize the aspects of sociologic order; we would rather be interested in those arguments supporting this statement and, at the same time, motivating a certain social behaviour with implications in territorial planning.

Table no. 1

Country	No. of monasteries
Bulgaria	160
Bosnia-Herzegovina	10
Cyprus	8
Greece	53
Moldavia	45
Montenegro	33
Romania	614
Russia	716
Serbia	57

(Source: <http://www.orthodox-monasteries.com>, with additions)

The territorial distribution of the monastic settlements inside Romania is strongly differentiated but this aspect is understudied for at least two reasons: firstly, there has past too little time from the re-launching of the religious phenomenon after the communist interdictions and this has not allowed theorizations time to process a large volume of data, the main preoccupation being the spiritual and material reconstruction; secondly, there is a certain predisposition of the scientific researcher who approaches with restraint what might belong to the canonic field. This might explain why from a geographical perspective, of formal or functional regionalization, no title can be mentioned here even if from a cultural, historic and architectural perspective numerous studies and consistent works have appeared in the last decades.

Taking into account the large number of churches (the Romanian patriarchy had in 2007 more than 14,000¹ orthodox worshipping places, parish churches, monasteries and chapels with social destination) we have decided to focus only on monastery churches (approximately 600), although due to their organizational and functional specificity, the results cannot be fully extrapolated to refer to all worshipping places.

Construction materials and realms

Many worshipping places are built today with durable construction materials, even modern in terms of constructive and esthetic performance, but the overwhelming majority still wears the signs of belonging to the regional “civilisation realm” – the realm of wood and the realm of stone.

The central-western part of the country, corresponding to the historic provinces of Ardeal, Maramureș, Crișana and Banat, belongs to the realm of wood. This is where the most Romanian wood churches are located and due to craftsmanship, constructive symbolism and age many of them have been include on the list of the national cultural patrimony. More than 12,000 wood churches built before 1900 are preserved in Romania, only a few of them belonging to a monastery. Their general value is inestimable for the Romanian culture, being an integrant part of the national identity. The wood churches of Romania share several fundamental features. Among these the most significant are the rectangular planimetry – elongated from east to west, the vaulting of the nave and the four-sloping roof. The quality of execution can be undoubtedly added to these since you cannot find a wood church made by simple workers anywhere, not even in remotest corners of the country. Apart from the shared features, the wood churches display a great diversity. The specialists group them according to regions, motivated especially by the different conditions under which the communities lived and erected praying places during time, by the manifestation of regionally specific formal features or just in administrative terms. Among the Romanian regions with the highest concentration of wood churches one can mention Maramureș, Năsăud and Sălaj.

The stone churches are emblematic for Moldavia and Walachia (the east and the south of the country). Painted or not, imposing or modest they bring along another type of

¹ The Russian Orthodox Church has more than 23,000 parishes (of which, over 50% (14,700) are in Ukraine), 154 bishoprics, 635 monasteries, 102 church schools.

historic information and influence upon the territory. The first argument of their perennality is the selection of the central location, naturally secured (rarely fortified as in the western world), with personalized architecture (styles, shapes, models). The oldest Romanian wall churches (stone and brick) preserved till today are the churches St. Nicoară and St. Nicolae in Curtea de Argeș, built in the age of founding of Walachia (before 1352). Both stand for the Byzantine-Constantinopolitan type, that is the purest Byzantine style, created in the capital of the empire in the age of the Macedonian emperors (9th – 11th centuries). (chart no 1)

Regional architectures

As far as the sacred architecture is concerned the three large Romanian provinces evolve under different influences which will reflect upon the regional architectural typology.

In Walachia, after the first churches of Byzantine type and afterwards of Serbian-Byzantine (Vodita, Tismana and Cozia monasteries) and those belonging to the local school of architecture of the 16th century (old Romanian or Walachian style, with churches of small sizes, most of them in the country and founded by boyars), starting with the 17th century a new era of blooming began for our church architecture, especially under the rule of Matei Basarab (1632-1653), and a new development is felt in the evolution of the Romanian style, through monuments founded by the Cantacuzino boyars (the church of Cotroceni monastery, the Lady's church and Colțea church in Bucharest, the old church of Sinaia monastery and others) which distinguish themselves by extra attention paid to interior and exterior decoration and especially by rich adornment of the floral motives which cover the columns in the church porch and narthex as well as the door and window frames. They constitute the premises of the Romanian style called "Brâncovanian" which flourishes under the rule of Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714) and which represents the completion or maturation of the autochthon style. We mention here, among them, the church of the Brâncovanian palace of Mogoșoaia in 1688 (which still preserves the rectangular scheme and characters of Matei Basarab's churches), the Hurezi monastery with all its architectural complex (1691 and the next), enlisted in the UNESCO patrimony, and others.

In Moldavia the church architecture had its own development, different from that in Walachia. It is based on the autochthon element, that is the art of the local craftsmen, materialized into the old and modest little wood churches which preceded the stone and wall ones. On top of these there came the foreign influences among which the one that is fundamental for the appearance of the Moldavian style is the Byzantine one, manifested in the predominant plan of the churches (spade-like or straight) and in their division, in the system of vault covering and in many elements of the external decoration. The oldest Moldavian wall churches are from the era of Moldavia's founding (the middle of the 16th century): St. Nicolae of Rădăuți (probably founded by Bogdan the Founder in 1359) and the Holly Trinity of Siret, probably founded by Lord Latcu (restored).

The age of Stephen the Great (the second half of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century) brings, almost a century earlier than in Walachia, the maturation and coagulation of a distinctive and original style of constructive art: the Moldavian style which can be distinguished by features specific to Moldavian churches, among the best known ones being the exterior decoration.

The architectonic art of Moldavia lives its last age of flourishing in the 17th century when it creates monuments with a strong oriental influence, of Caucasian and Arab influence, coming via Russia and materialized in the superb sculptural decoration in stone of Dragomir (the work of bishop Anastasie Crimca in 1609) and especially St. Trei Ierarhi of Iași (founded by Vasile Lupu in 1639), Barnova in Iași (1626-1629), and others.

By the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century a new current of neoclassical art coming from Russia creates several churches like St. Spiridon in Iași (reconstructed in 1804) and Frumoasa near Iași (remade in 1836) which is believed to be the last outstanding monument of Moldavian architecture.

The 19th century means both for Walachia and Moldavia the almost total disappearance of the old Romanian style from the church architectonic, due to the western and Russian influences (the latter ones visible especially in Moldavia, in the tendency to increase the number of towers of various shapes especially those that are onion-form);

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century bring the rebirth not only of the national style in civil architecture but also of the Byzantine-Romanian one in our church architecture due to the architects and art historians grouped around the ex-Commission of Historic Monuments (N. Iorga, Gr. Cerkez, N. Ghika-Budești and others). Under the lead of some architects like Petre Antonescu, N. Ionescu-Berechet and others cathedral-churches and monumental parish churches are built going back to the shapes of the classical Byzantine architecture or reproducing the most successful monuments of the Walachian national style (Brâncovanian) or Moldavian (St. Elefterie Nou and St. Vinerei-Grivița in Bucharest, the metropolitan cathedral in Sibiu, the cathedral in Tg. Mureș, the cathedral of the ex-bishopry in Constanța and others)

In Transylvania, due to the vassalage situation until 1918, the Romanian population could not develop an orthodox architectonic art to the same extent with Walachia and Moldavia, and the modest Romanian wall churches built here suffered, more than the ones from the rest of the country, the influence of the Roman and gothic churches of the cohabiting nationalities, and until those churches of Moldavian or Walachian influence, its mark of originality and Romanian identity was represented by the wood churches.

Sacred centers and peripheries

The Romanian territory regionalized according to the functional logic of the polarizing forces and of the pulsing concentrations emphasizes three areas of monastic religious centre type.

The mapping of the monastic phenomenon at the level of the entire Romanian space has revealed territorial concentrations with various degrees of agglutination of monasteries and hermitages. According to the density of the monastic worshiping places there are three categories of geographic areas: *areas of high spiritual energy*, *areas of major spiritual concentration* and *areas that are spiritually weak, unclear or irrelevant* (see the table)

<i>Areas of high spiritual concentration</i>	<i>Type of landscape/geographical unit</i>
Oltenia Province / Vâlcea County	The Getic Subcarpathians
Muntenia Province / Buzău County	The Curburii Subcarpathians
Moldova Province / Neamț County	The Moldavia Subcarpathians Stânișoarei Mountains

The first observation that easily stands out regards the common or at least comparable “nature” of the three locations: levels of landscape with moderate accessibility, generally located between 500 and 1,000 m, with a high degree of fragmentation and landscape energies of 300 m, permanent hydrographic venues, forestry layer of deciduous species. But the sub Carpathian “frame” displays these features quasi-continuously along its entire length without cult settlements of the same density, fact which can be explained by the other factors of influence and concentration, namely the degree of isolation and distance to populated settlements, the notoriety of certain pioneering monks around those places, the policy of the administrations, etc.

The second group of areas brings together territories more diverse in terms of physical and geographical conditions and of population.

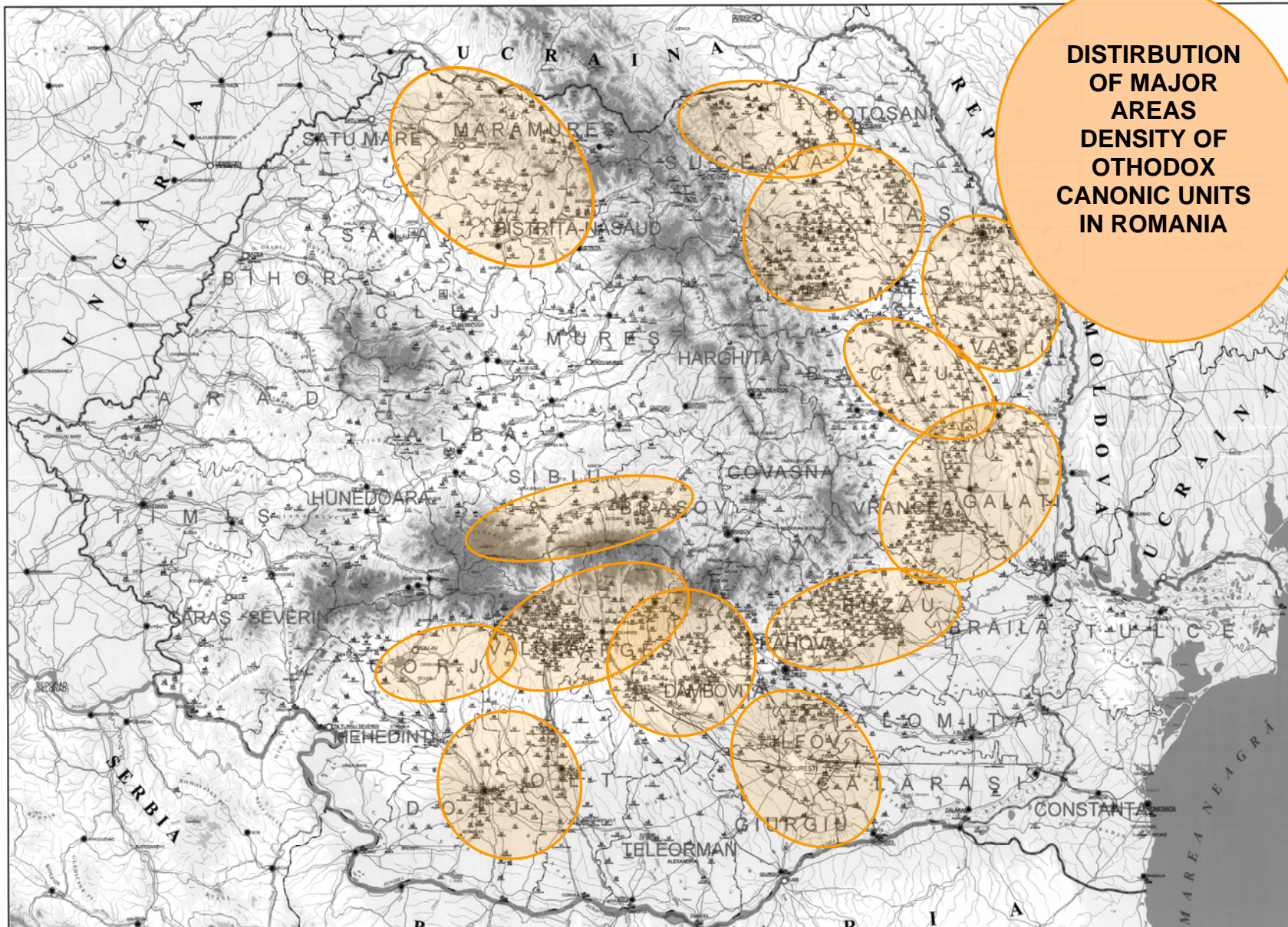
<i>Areas of major spiritual concentration</i>	<i>Type of landscape/geographical unit</i>
Craiova – Slatina – Drăgășani	The Romanian Plain
Târgoviște – Pitești – Câmpulung	The Romanian Plain – Subcarpathians
Ploiești – Câmpina – Vălenii de Munte	The Curburii Subcarpathians – Romanian Plain
Ploiești – București – Urziceni	The Romanian Plain
Râmnicu Sărat – Focșani	The Romanian Plain
Trotușului Valley	The Curburii Subcarpathians
The Central Moldavian Plateau	The Central Moldavian tableland
Suceava	The Suceava Tableland – Obcine, Bucovina Hills
Olt Valley	The Făgăraș Depression
Maramureș – Lăpuș	The Carpathians and Transilvania Hills

It can be seen that the second large location area belongs to the Plain; it must be said that the forest is the polarizing element, few monastic settlements looking for the harshness of the open plain which could have reminded of the Egypt desert conditions where the first Christian hermits secluded themselves. This is also the area where we find the most “urban” monasteries, some of them located in the very heart of the capital city.

III. Special/spatial planning

Cultural environments defined as geographically delimited areas that reflect significant features of societal development must be identified in order to conserve a broad representative section of the cultural heritage. Safeguarding the cultural heritage (according to the principles of ESDP and CEMAT documents) requires first of all the recognition of it in different type of its manifestation, from religious behaviour to the use of the landscape for agriculture and the architectural forms. Promoting the regional cultures, as the orthodox is one, through planning is an interdisciplinary task with two main phases. The first phase use information from various sources (national registers, public authorities) and the second one implies the planning instruments.

Our present work offers a part of the surveying cultural regionalization to be analyzed further pursued by a delimiting and setting priorities. In ensemble, all regions delimited fulfil the major criteria to be considered for special planning: i) unique or rare phenomenon by its density/intensity; ii) representative for a type (churches), epoch (historic and contemporary era) and geographic area (Europe, Balkans, Christianity); iii) functional status (actually almost complete functionality), iii) authenticity and state of conservation.



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The cultural environment phenomenon of Romanian orthodox monasteries is more than others cultural representation on this space, by its perenity and individuality in landscapes where, romanian ortodox spirit has a trully real behaviour estate.

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